Keeling & Associates
Change for Learning

Middlebury College

"Directions" Survey Report
Executive Summary

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www.KeelingAssociates.com | 55 Harry Kemp Way Provincetown, MA 02657 | Phone 212-229-4750

Introduction

Middlebury College (Middlebury; the institution) engaged in a year-long process of community dialogue, "Envisioning Middlebury," among all of the institution's locations, campuses, and constituents about Middlebury's future, laying the foundation for a strategic planning process that will occur this year.[1] The results of two surveys will inform that effort: the first, "Connections," implemented in Spring 2016, was designed to help map formal and informal networks among faculty and staff across Middlebury; the second, "Directions," implemented in Fall 2016, centered on four open-ended questions:

1. *List three words that you would use to describe Middlebury as you experience it.*

2. *Please describe the greatest strength that Middlebury should build on to ensure a bright future.*

3. *What is Middlebury's greatest challenge now?*

4. *Look into your crystal ball and predict one trend that will play out in higher education in the next 25 years. What is that trend and how might Middlebury best respond?*

The "Directions" survey was designed by the Office of Assessment and Institutional Research and administered to faculty, staff, and students, including: Middlebury College[2] faculty, staff, and undergraduate students; Middlebury Institute (MIIS; the Institute; Monterey) faculty, staff, and students; Breadloaf School of English (BLSE; Breadloaf) faculty, staff, and students; and Language School (LS) faculty, staff, graduate and non-degree students. The "Directions" survey was sent to alumni in a second administration of the survey later in Fall 2016; the summary of responses to that survey will follow in mid-January as an addendum to this report.

K&A reviewed, analyzed, and summarized responses to the "Directions" survey for all constituencies with the exception of alumni (as above); we delivered the Survey Report to the Office of Assessment and Institutional Research on December 19, 2016. This

[1] Source: http://www.middlebury.edu/about/president/envisioning-middlebury.

[2] Middlebury College refers here to the faculty, staff, and students teaching, working, and enrolled, respectively, at Middlebury in Vermont.

Executive Summary provides a high level overview of prominent themes and a comparison of themes across groups of respondents.

Survey Response and Response Rates

Table 1, below, displays the responses to the survey by respondent group.[3]

Table 1. Responses across groups

Position	Sent To	Submitted complete/all responses	Response rate: complete	Submitted with response to at least 1 question	Response rate: partial
College Faculty	680	203	30%	142	21%
College Staff	1599	364	23%	243	15%
College Student	4535	395	9%	258	6%
MIIS Faculty	130	39	30%	29	22%
MIIS Staff	198	73	37%	45	23%
MIIS Student	702	68	10%	42	6%
Grand Total	7844	1142	15%	759	10%

"College" figures include BLSE and LS respondents.

In addition, 2,236 faculty, staff, and students were invited to complete the survey in a summer administration; 188 responded,[4] yielding an 8% response rate for that administration of the survey. The 188 included faculty, staff, and students from the College, BLSE, and LS. Tables 2 and 3, below, break down response totals by constituent groups, including summer students.

[3] The figures in this table were provided to K&A by the Director of Assessment and Institutional Research.

[4] Including blank submissions.

Table 2. Distribution of respondents from K&A's analysis of the data, all groups

Position	Number of respondents	Percentage of total responses
BLSE Faculty	2	0.1%
BLSE Student	33	3%
College Faculty	163	14%
College Staff	364	32%
College Student	250	22%
LS Faculty	40	4%
LS Grad Student	46	4%
LS Non-degree Student	63	6%
LS Staff	6	0.5%
MIIS Faculty	39	3%
MIIS Student	65	6%
MIIS Staff	72	6%
Total Respondents	**1,143**	**100%**

Table 3. Distribution of respondents from K&A's analysis of the data, aggregate counts of students/faculty/staff responses[5]

Position	Number of respondents	Percentage of total responses
All Students	457	40%
All Faculty	244	21%
All Staff	442	39%
Total	**1,143**	**100%**

[5] Though the proportion of respondents who are faculty was smaller than that of students or staff, a smaller absolute number of people are faculty than is true of either students or staff. Therefore, it is important to remember both the distribution of response rates (the percentages of people in each category who responded to all or part of the survey) and the distribution of categories of people among respondents when examining the summaries of the data to follow. At 40% and 39% of respondents, students and staff are disproportionately represented among overall respondents, but the overall response rates of students, especially, and staff were lower than the response rates of faculty.

Summary of Survey Results

The following is a summary overview of prominent themes that emerged among responses to each question of the "Directions" survey, as well as a comparison of themes across groups of constituents. Qualitative survey data were analyzed for themes using Atlas.ti®. In this report, themes are presented in approximate order of frequency with which they appeared in the data. Quotations within the summaries exemplify or illustrate themes and are representative of the thoughts shared by multiple respondents; text in quotation marks are the respondents' own words, unedited, as shared in their responses, or excerpts of responses. K&A respected and maintained confidentiality of responses throughout the analysis.

Survey Results

The same overarching themes emerged across responses to all of the questions and across groups of constituents. Briefly, these recurring themes include:

- The rigor and quality of education at Middlebury College: Many wrote of intellectually challenging, inspiring, innovative, and engaging teaching, learning, and scholarship. Faculty, staff, and students alike highlighted the excellence of faculty, caliber of students, and unique and demanding programs of study. Several noted the challenge of maintaining quality in the face of rising costs, increasing diversity, and incorporating technology into an evolving pedagogy.
- Frustrations and concerns over the tension between the small, liberal arts traditions and expansive growth, both in the recent past and as anticipated in the near future: The growth was described by many as an overcommitment, "unfocused," "contrived," and "bloated"; respondents frequently noted that such growth has contributed to a "fractured" identity in which few understand how all of the parts of the institution relate to the whole, and has distracted from Middlebury's mission and core—in the words of one respondent, "perhaps losing its soul in the race."
- Increasing and supporting diversity and inclusion: Many characterized Middlebury as "elitist" or "exclusive" and noted the need to increase diversity among all constituencies, but especially students, along lines of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, geography, and, importantly, socioeconomic status. Others see increasing diversity as necessary, but also question how admitting socioeconomically diverse students will affect financial sustainability and admissions standards. Many respondents described

the current environment as "open" and "welcoming," though a smaller number noted that it is "segregated" and "alienating"; these comments suggest that greater equity, inclusion, and "engagement across differences" must accompany greater diversity.

- Supporting the success of all students, both inside and outside the classroom: According to a large number of respondents, Middlebury should provide exceptional levels of faculty-student engagement and excellent stress and mental health resources; devalue "overworking" and the "culture of perfection"; ensure adequate career and life preparation and resources; and foster a strong sense of community that, for many, is a signature element of the Middlebury experience. Though many described the institution's intimacy as contributing to a caring and engaging environment, a not insignificant number complained of the "insular" and "sheltered" nature of the "Middlebury bubble."
- Preparing students for lives and careers: Many described the benefits of a Middlebury experience and defended the relevance of the liberal arts in providing students with the foundations they need for life, careers, and citizenship: global perspectives, language training, critical thinking skills, appreciation for diversity, and hands-on and immersive learning experiences. Still, a large number of respondents questioned if and how to remain true to the core of the mission and history of Middlebury while providing students with practical and professional preparation—and competing with institutions explicitly offering vocational training.
- Issues of financial sustainability and access: Faculty and staff mainly noted the former, while students focused on the related concerns of increasing costs, financial aid, and accessibility to a larger range of socioeconomically diverse students; in sum, "Paying for [Middlebury's] vision and making it affordable to a diverse student body." Other respondents wrote of "bloat" and "attenuation" contributing to an unsustainable model —Middlebury may find itself unable to offer aid to the diverse students it hopes to attract. While growth was initially seen as a probable contributor to future sustainability, many now view the additional programs and campuses as drains on its finances.

Table 4, below, shows the summary of the key themes which emerged across responses to the four questions of the survey. Themes that were the same or similar are color coded within the table. Themes which are not shaded in the table were unique to that question.

Table 4. Themes across questions

Question 1: 3 words to describe Middlebury	Question 2: Greatest strength Middlebury should build on	Question 3: Greatest challenge now	Question 4: Trend and response
High quality, rigorous, and intellectually challenging educational experience	Sense of community, devotion to students, and commitment to learning	Improving and supporting diversity and inclusion	Technology and flexible learning
Tension between growth and tradition	"World class faculty," academic rigor and excellence:	Financial sustainability and affordability	Change and growth
Diversity and inclusion	"Small liberal arts college with a global perspective"	Issues of identity and growth	Applied learning and preparation for life, career, and citizenship
Student success and support	Preparation for life, careers, and citizenship	Supporting students' success	Affordability, access, and student success
Preparation for life and career	Support for diversity and inclusion	Maintaining high quality in the face of costs	Increasing diversity of all kinds
Financial constraints and access		Preparation for careers, life, and citizenship	Student support

The following are key themes which emerged among responses to each question, as well as brief discussions of the differences among responses from faculty, staff, and students.

Question 1: *List three words that you would use to describe Middlebury as you experience it.*

The most frequently cited themes among all responses included:

- The high quality, rigorous, intellectually challenging, inspiring, innovative, and intense educational experience
- Tensions between growth and tradition, and an evolving identity
- Increase in and support for diversity and an inclusive and welcoming campus, decrease in "entitled," "privileged" students
- Support for student success in a small, intimate, and caring community, and managing stress and intensity of the student experience

- Preparation for life and career through practical, relevant, and experiential learning and preparation, exposure to global, international, and multicultural experiences and language programs, and preparation for citizenship
- Attention to financial sustainability and issues of access and the lack of socioeconomic diversity
- Issues with bureaucracy and "over-management," lack of transparency and trust, inefficiency and waste, and "corporate" culture

Table 5. Most frequently used codes for responses to Question 1, across groups

Faculty	Staff	Students
Quality, rigor, intellectually challenging, competitive, leader	Quality, rigor, intellectually challenging, competitive, leader	Quality, rigor, intellectually challenging, competitive, leader
Inspiring, invigorating, passionate	Inspiring, invigorating, passionate	Inspiring, invigorating, passionate
Stressful, intense, busy	Sense of community	Stressful, intense, busy
Sense of community	Fractured, unfocused, overextended	Sense of community
Fractured, unfocused, overextended	Identity, evolving identity, growth versus tradition	Idyllic, beautiful, nature, active community

- While respondents across categories noted similar qualities to describe their Middlebury experience, particularly as related to academic quality and sense of community, there were a few notable differences across groups:

    - Faculty and staff reported concerns about the growth and expansion of the institution, as well as the perception that Middlebury may be straying too far from its mission and/or history, more frequently than students did. Staff and faculty were also overrepresented among respondents sharing concerns about the evolving identity of the institution; these responses were also much more frequent among respondents at the College compared to those at the Institute.
    - Staff were also overrepresented among respondents noting concerns about financial sustainability and bureaucracy; students offered only a few responses related to either.

- Students used words related to increasing diversity of all kinds and improving support for diversity and inclusion on campus far more frequently than faculty or staff. While students wrote of "elitism" and the need to increase socioeconomic diversity at Middlebury, they were less likely to directly link access issues to financial sustainability concerns than were staff.

Question 2: *Please describe the greatest strength that Middlebury should build on to ensure a bright future.*

The most frequently cited themes mirrored the positive characteristics shared in response to Question 1. These included:

- Strong sense of community, support for students, commitment to learning, and close student-faculty relationships and engagement, though a need to improve support for diversity and inclusion, collaboration, and communication
- A "world class faculty," high caliber of students, academic rigor, intellectual engagement and "risk taking," and excellence
- A "small liberal arts college with a global perspective," strength in languages, but also "fractured" and confused growth
- Preparation for life, careers, and citizenship
- Support for and increase in diversity and inclusion, engaging around difference, addressing related issues of enrollment and affordability

Table 6. Most frequently used codes for responses to Question 2, across groups

Faculty	Staff	Students
Quality, rigor, intellectually challenging, competitive, leader	Global/globalization, international, multicultural	Quality, rigor, intellectually challenging, competitive, leader
Faculty quality	Quality, rigor, intellectually challenging, competitive, leader	Diversity
Global/globalization, international, multicultural	Diversity	Sense of community
Language programs	Faculty quality	Language programs
Liberal arts	Student support, development	Student support, development
Student quality	Innovation, creativity	Inclusion, social justice, welcoming

- While high proportions of all groups of respondents agreed that Middlebury offers a high quality, rigorous educational experience with "world class faculty" and a rigorous curriculum, they differed in how frequently they cited other key strengths.
    - Comments about the sense of community and "high touch" learning environment were much more frequent among students than either faculty or staff.
    - Staff and students offered more comments related to global experiences and perspectives, and the institution's leadership in languages, than faculty.
    - Many more staff wrote of preparation for life, career, and citizenship.
    - Students shared many more comments related to diversity and inclusion—and the need for improving both—than staff or faculty; faculty offered the fewest comments.

Question 3: What is Middlebury's greatest challenge now?

The most frequently cited themes included:

- Improving and supporting diversity and inclusion, fostering community, engaging across difference, and appreciating and supporting diversity beyond Middlebury
- Increasing financial sustainability and affordability and improving support for a socioeconomically diverse student population
- Issues of identity and growth, negotiating the relationships between component parts of the "Big M," refocusing, redefining identity, "saying no" to overcommitment, and adopting evolving pedagogy
- Supporting students' success, attention to stress, mental health, and the "culture of perfection," and changing the culture
- Maintaining high quality in the face of rising costs through technology, new pedagogy
- Preparation for careers, life, and citizenship through experiential, hands-on learning, promoting the relevance of the liberal arts, offering job placement support, and exposure to language and global programs

Table 7. Most frequently used codes for responses to Question 3, across groups

Faculty	Staff	Students
Financial sustainability	Financial sustainability	Diversity
Fractured, unfocused, overextended	Identity/evolving identity, growth	Inclusion, social justice, welcoming
Identity/evolving identity, growth	Fractured, unfocused, overextended	Affordability, financial aid, access

Faculty	Staff	Students
Diversity	Affordability, financial aid, access	Quality, rigor, intellectually challenging, competitive, leader
Affordability, financial aid, access	Diversity	Enrollment, recruitment, retention

- Faculty, staff, and students all wrote of the challenges Middlebury faces related to increasing diversity and inclusion, increasing affordability and access, maintaining quality in the face of rising costs, and providing students with adequate preparation for careers, life, and citizenship.
    - Though all noted the need to increase diversity of all kinds across campus, students noted this challenge more often than faculty and staff, as was true in Questions 1 and 2. Though students offered twice as many comments overall as faculty, both noted the need to "engage across difference" and "find a balance" between "managing aggressions" and teaching students to have a "thick skin."
    - As opposed to staff and (to a lesser extent) faculty, almost no students wrote of challenges related to the financial sustainability of the institution; student comments related mostly to affordability, financial aid, and access.
    - Staff provided the greatest number of comments related to issues of identity and the tension between growth and expansion and liberal arts traditions.
    - Students provided more than twice as many responses related to supporting student success than faculty, with staff in between. The majority of comments focused on the culture of "busy-ness," the stress which results, and how Middlebury can provide adequate support for students.

Question 4: Look into your crystal ball and predict one trend that will play out in higher education in the next 25 years. What is that trend and how might Middlebury best respond?

The most commonly cited themes included:

- Growth, change, and adoption of technology in a way that includes self-directed, "individualized" learning, niche and boutique programs, and improved access to information, while staying true to the liberal arts core
- Applied learning and preparation for life, career, and citizenship through a focus on STEM fields, interdisciplinarity, "flexible" work and study, pre-professional training, global experiences and language training, not "ROI"

- Affordability, access, and student success that attends to rising costs and enrollment of socioeconomically diverse students through adoption of online learning and other solutions to costs, access, and improving "value"
- Increasing diversity of all kinds and engagement with difference
- Student support

Table 8. Most frequently used codes for responses to Question 4, across groups

Faculty	Staff	Students
Technology, digital learning	Technology, digital learning	Affordability, financial aid, access
Preparation for life, career, and citizenship	Affordability, financial aid, access	Technology, digital learning
Experiential, immersive learning	Preparation for life, career, and citizenship	Diversity
Affordability, financial aid, access	Diversity	Preparation for life, career, and citizenship
Diversity	Value	Inclusion, social justice, welcoming

- Faculty, staff, and students agreed on several of the most significant trends facing higher education, including changing learning modes and environments, academic calendars and enrollment, relevance of liberal arts, access to information, applied learning and preparation for careers, and, most frequently, the integration of technology in teaching and learning. Almost all respondents concurred that Middlebury should adopt changes thoughtfully and adapt without "losing the human touch." A staff member summed up the thoughts of many: "Go fast slowly."
    - Staff and students more frequently noted the significance of trends related to affordability, access, and adequately supporting students.
    - Staff and students also wrote more frequently about trends related to increasing diversity, multiculturalism, and support for diversity; a large portion of these comments were related to increasing socioeconomic diversity, affordability, and access, overlapping a great deal with the previous theme.
    - Several faculty dismissed the question and the idea of reacting to trends, in general; as a faculty member stated, "The best crystal ball says there's no such thing as a crystal ball."